

Article for Pacific Northwest Aviation Business Journal

Almost 75 years old, but keeping up with the aviation needs of tomorrow, King County International Airport/Boeing Field is one of the busiest general aviation airports in the nation. Rich with history and vital to the regional economy, Boeing Field is known worldwide. Beginning with this article and continuing monthly, airport staff will provide the stories and background of the Airport as it continues to evolve with a vision for the future.

King County International Airport (KCIA) is a general aviation reliever airport located in the Duwamish industrial corridor between downtown Seattle and Sea-Tac International Airport (Sea-Tac). KCIA covers 594 acres and has two parallel runways: Runway 13R/31L which is 10,000 feet by 200 feet, and Runway 13L/31R which is 3,710 feet by 150 feet. The busiest general aviation airport serving the Puget Sound region, KCIA is open 24 hours per day and handled approximately 290,000 operations last year.

The airport is operated as a division of King County's Department of Transportation and as an enterprise agency, using its revenues to fund operations. KCIA does not receive any tax support from King County or the State of Washington. The airport is eligible for FAA grants funding for specifically approved capital projects.

KCIA was established in 1928 following a vote of the public to approve general obligation bonds for the purpose of building an airport that would encourage retention of The Boeing Company in this area. KCIA's present role within the regional aviation system is to serve the based and itinerant GA operations, support the business and financial activities of the Seattle-King county area, provide convenient locations for based GA aircraft and associated small GA activities such as flight schools, and to support a variety of large and small businesses, including The Boeing Company and more than 100 other businesses. These include fixed based operators offering fuel, charter, air taxi, and aircraft maintenance services; flight schools; express cargo; feeder cargo; corporate hangars; aviation retail; aviation and aerospace manufacturing.

Currently over 470 aircraft of all types are based at the airfield. KCIA contributes more than \$1.43 billion of economic activity to the region annually and directly or indirectly supports 10,600 jobs in the area. The value of the airport was recently recognized by NATA in 2001 when it named KCIA as one of the "100 Most Needed Airports" in the nation.

KCIA also serves as a weather alternate airport for Sea-Tac. The two runways allow the airport to accommodate the diverse mix of current operations, including corporate jets, privately owned planes, cargo carriers, charter flights, military aircraft, Boeing aircraft deliveries and Boeing test flight operations. Itinerant operations account for almost 65 percent of the Airport's operations.

Operating such a facility that occupies a relatively small area in close proximity to a major city center and with such a diverse mix of aircraft presents a number of unique challenges to management and staff. Of paramount importance is the requirement to manage and operate a safe and secure facility. As an airport having commercial air service, KCIA must comply with Federal Air Regulations (FAR) Part 139. KCIA has developed a formal set of procedures to meet these requirements, which are contained together with a listing of facilities and equipment, in its certification manual. The airport is subject to comprehensive annual inspections by FAA personnel. This inspection involves a review of existing airfield conditions, airport plans, procedures, staff training, as well as a test of the airport's emergency preparedness through a timed aircraft fire drill response.

The impact of the airport as a regional economic engine was particularly noticeable following the February 28, 2001, Nisqually Earthquake. Both runways experienced severe damage, involving pavement failure, heaving and liquification in some areas. Taxiway Bravo was also heavily damaged as were a number of connecting taxiways and public ramps. Additionally, the air traffic control tower was damaged to such an extent that it was closed. The net effect was a full closure of the airport pending an assessment of damage. This closure essentially held all fixed wing aircraft "captive" including The Boeing Company deliveries, cargo aircraft, as well as corporate fixed based and itinerant aircraft. Further, critical aircraft arrivals such as new Boeing Company deliveries requiring painting, mainline and feeder cargo could not access KCIA.

Following a detailed evaluation of airport pavement and airfield lighting systems by airport personnel, FAA and consultant staff, a creative recovery plan was developed and implemented that allowed the airport to operate at limited capacity.. This allowed our tenants to implement their own contingency plans. Mainline cargo carriers temporarily operated from Payne Field and Sea-Tac; and The Boeing Company was able to maintain its delivery and painting activities.

Following an intensive period of major pavement rehabilitation, the airport returned to normal operations. Two full-length runways were re-opened less than two weeks following the earthquake!

The ongoing management and operations of the airport requires a team of dedicated professionals. A staff of 52 occupying positions in management, engineering, maintenance, and administration carries this out. Airport firefighting, policing and security as well as operations functions are performed by a compliment of 17 Sheriff's Deputy Staff under contract from the King County Sheriff's office. Future articles will cover some of the routine and unique activities carried out by staff in these sections.